

# Rotavirus

**What is rotavirus?**

Rotavirus is a virus that causes severe diarrhea, vomiting, fever and dehydration. It usually occurs in infants and young children. In fact, it is the most common cause of gastroenteritis, or inflammation of the stomach and intestines, in children under 4 years old. It is seen most often in the cooler months of the year, during winter and spring.

**How common is rotavirus?**

Every year in the United States rotavirus is responsible for more than 400,000 doctor visits, more than 200,000 emergency room visits, up to 70,000 hospitalizations and 20 to 60 deaths.

**What are the symptoms of rotavirus?**

Rotavirus usually starts about two days after a person has been exposed to the virus. Early symptoms are fever, upset stomach and vomiting, followed by diarrhea that may last from three to eight days.

Children may lose interest in eating and drinking and may become dehydrated from loss of fluids.

A child may get the disease more than once, but after the first time, the infections are usually more mild.

**How is rotavirus spread?**

Rotavirus is very contagious and spreads easily from infected children to other children, and even to adults. It is passed through the stool of an infected person to hands and objects, and then on to other people. Children can spread the virus even before they develop diarrhea and after they no longer have it.

**How is rotavirus treated?**

Children and people with severe cases of rotavirus are treated for dehydration with fluid replacement.

**Who is at risk for rotavirus?**

Anyone is at risk for rotavirus, but children are the most likely to get it.

**What should I do if I or my child have the symptoms of rotavirus?**

If you or your child develop symptoms of rotavirus, contact your health care provider.

**How can I protect my children from rotavirus?**

The best protection against rotavirus is the rotavirus oral vaccine RotaTeq®. Studies show it will prevent about 74% of all rotavirus cases and 98% of the most severe cases, including 96% of cases requiring hospitalization. It was licensed by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in February 2006 and is currently the only vaccine approved in the U.S. for prevention of rotavirus.

**Who should get rotavirus vaccine?**

Children should get three doses of rotavirus vaccine at age 2, 4 and 6 months. The first dose should be given between 6 and 12 weeks of age. Children should complete all three doses by 32 weeks of age.

Some children should not get the vaccine, including children who have had a life-threatening allergic reaction to a previous dose of rotavirus vaccine or to any component of the vaccine. Children who are moderately or severely ill should wait to be vaccinated. Parents of children with ongoing digestive problems, weakened immune systems or recent blood transfusions or products (such as immune globulin) should consult with a health care provider before vaccination.

**What are the risks from rotavirus vaccine?**

Like any medicine a vaccine could cause serious problems, such as severe allergic reactions. However, the risk of the rotavirus vaccine causing serious harm or death is very small. Getting the vaccine is safer than getting the disease.

Children who have received the vaccine are 1-3% more likely to have mild, temporary diarrhea or vomiting within 7 days after getting a dose of the vaccine than children who have not been vaccinated.

Any moderate or severe reactions should be reported immediately to your health care provider.